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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000027

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND DS/IP/NEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2019  
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [KPAO](#) [KWBG](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: OMANI PROTESTS AGAINST EVENTS IN GAZA TAKE  
INCREASINGLY ANTI-U.S. TONE

REF: A. MUSCAT 013  
[1](#)B. MUSCAT 006

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: More demonstrations against Israeli actions in Gaza took place in three separate Omani cities the afternoon of January 9. While remaining peaceful, protesters - some of whom displayed signs of support for Hamas and/or Hizballah - burned Israeli flags and increasingly turned their anger towards the U.S. The government of Oman continues to refrain from making pronouncements on events in Gaza, although there has been no let-up in local media criticism of Israel. Several editorials have recently cast blame on the U.S. administration for supporting or even "instigating" the Israeli campaign in Gaza. Anti-U.S. sentiment has not yet affected post's activities or its working relations with government and private contacts. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Following previous protests against Israeli military operations in Gaza (ref B) and a January 6 candlelight vigil at Palestinian Embassy in Muscat, peaceful demonstrations in three Omani cities took place after Friday prayers on January [1](#)9. In the southern port city of Salalah, the site of two earlier demonstrations, an estimated 800-1,000 protesters marched from the Sultan Qaboos Mosque to a main commercial street in the town center. Demonstrators chanted slogans denouncing the U.S. and "collaborating traitors" in addition to spouting vehement verbal attacks against Israel. Included among the many placards were several stating, in English, "Israel America = Kill Children." A small group of protesters burned a home-made Israeli flag; some non-Omanis waved small Hamas and Hizballah banners. Both Omani nationals and expatriate residents participated in the demonstration. Many children were also present, some of whom carried out a mock funeral procession using a facsimile of a dead Palestinian child.

[1](#)3. (SBU) In the conservative interior city of Nizwa, several hundred individuals demonstrated near the main mosque in the city center. At least one Israeli flag was burned as protesters railed against Israel and, to a lesser extent, the U.S. and "traitors and collaborators."

[1](#)4. (SBU) The Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat, the site of the largest protest in Oman to date (ref B), saw between 300-500 men, women and children gather on Friday after prayer. Reflecting the greater concentration of expatriates in the Omani capital, the demonstration featured a large percentage of non-Omani Arabs, particularly those from the Levant region. Several of these individuals carried Hamas and Hizballah banners; others wore green headbands in a show of support for Hamas. Participants more actively denounced the U.S. and "collaborators" than during previous protests. A smaller demonstration took place outside a mosque in the Bousher area of the capital.

15. (U) In addition to protests, a number of Omani civil society organizations, including the Oman Journalists Association, Oman Writers and Scholars Association, and Oman Poetry Society, have joined forces to sponsor "Support Gaza" events at the Omani Cultural Club from January 11-14. During the January 10 match between the Omani and Bahraini national teams in the ongoing Gulf Cup soccer tournament, several fans in the stadium, and one Omani player, displayed "Solidarity with Gaza" signs.

16. (SBU) The government of Oman has refrained from issuing public statements on the situation in Gaza since working with local media to publicize the January 5 tongue-lashing of resident ambassadors of UN Security Council member nations by the Omani foreign minister (ref A). However, building on prior news stories of Omani humanitarian aid to Gaza (ref B), local dailies on January 8 prominently covered the airlift of the second consignment of relief materials to Al Areesh in Egypt for delivery to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. (Note: The government-affiliated Oman Charitable Organization remains the only charity in Oman authorized to collect donations and send assistance bound for Gaza. End Note.) In an interview published January 11 in state-owned Arabic daily "Oman," Sheik Ahmad bin Hamed al-Khalili, Grand Mufti of the Sultanate, stated, "Israeli massacres and (Israel's) total disregard for human rights are a result of a lack of accountability by the international community. Resorting to the UN Security Council is useless; Arabs and Muslims must make their own decisions and stand up for their rights."

17. (SBU) Apart from government pronouncements, Omani

MUSCAT 00000027 002 OF 002

newspapers are carrying an unusually large number of photos of dead women and children in Gaza, including some horrific pictures on the front pages. Editorials in all the major dailies continue to condemn Israel, and increasingly the U.S., in harsh terms. An op-ed piece in the January 11 edition of independent Arabic daily "Shabiba," for example, stated, "Every year Israel, supported by America, feasts on Arab blood while we stand around crying for help from a useless UN Security Council." The English-language daily "Times of Oman" alleged that Israel's military campaign in Gaza was "plotted by the U.S. administration" and that President Bush "has given the go-ahead to decimate what remains of Gaza" while supplying the "Jewish war machine" with sophisticated military equipment.

18. (C) Comment: The latest protests in Oman, which were covered by Al-Jazeera, remained peaceful and posed no immediate security threat to the Embassy or its staff. However, as reflected by banner slogans and verbal chants, the U.S. is becoming more of a target for demonstrators' ire. The content of local blogs and on-line discussion sites further indicate that animosity towards the U.S. is on the rise, as is anti-Egyptian sentiment. To date, this has not resulted in the reported harassment of Americans in Oman; nor has it adversely affected post's operations or its working relations with contacts in the government or private sector.

19. (C) Comment (continued): That these most recent demonstrations took place in three very distinct cities with different demographics ) Nizwa, for example, is a stronghold of Ibadhi Omanis while Salalah is almost all Sunni Muslim ) shows that anger over the carnage in Gaza is widespread throughout the Sultanate and not centered in any particular community or sect. The government is fortunate that Sultan Qaboos University, the country's only public university and the site of a violent demonstration during the Second Intifada in 2000, has been out of session so as to preclude large-scale student protests. Classes are expected to restart, however, on January 31. End Comment.

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